

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 10-06-2016		2. REPORT TYPE Master's Thesis		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) 27-07-2015 to 10-06-2016	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE  NATO's Relevance to United States Enduring National Interests <i>Time to Remove the Training Wheels but Continue to Hold the Handle Bars</i>				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) LTC Sean F. Counihan, USAR-AGR				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)  National Defense University Joint Forces Staff College Joint Advanced Warfighting School 7800 Hampton Blvd Norfolk, VA. 23511-1702				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT  Approved for public release, distribution is unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT From its inception in December 1950, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has been the bedrock of European security and a strategic foundation of the United States' foreign policy to the European region. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War many were quick to argue that NATO had become obsolete. Additionally, these same pundits contend that NATO is out of date with current U.S. foreign policy. However, this thesis asserts that NATO continues to afford the United States the ability to protect its vital national interests and project influence globally. A strong role in NATO provides the United States a conduit and connective structure to some of the world's most stable governments, serves as the main policy mechanism by which it can influence Europe, and provides a venue for legitimacy and freedom of global action. The United States is no longer bound to provide security to NATO members by forward basing hundreds of thousands of military forces along the Eastern European front. NATO members are developing (with the assistance of the United States) the capability to provide sufficient security with a decreased role for United States forces. Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR is utilized as a case study to demonstrate that while the United States is still the largest power in NATO, possessing the ability to lead and conduct full spectrum operations, there are times when leading from behind can not only benefit the alliance but also allow America to focus its assets globally in the pursuit of its national interests. Now a full quarter of a century after the end of the Cold War, the idea of NATO losing its relevancy should be set aside as uninformed. NATO continues to be of vital importance to United States' enduring national security interests and remains central to its national strategies. It is essential that the United States continues its leadership role in the strongest alliance the world has ever known.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS NATO, International Organizations, Foreign Policy & Alliances					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT  UNCLASSIFIED/ UNLIMITED	18. NUMBER OF PAGES  49	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Director of JAWS
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code) 757-443-6301



***JOINT FORCES STAFF COLLEGE***

**JOINT ADVANCED WARFIGHTING SCHOOL**



**NATO's Relevance to United States Enduring National Interests**

***Time to Remove the Training Wheels but Continue to Hold the Handle Bars***

**by**

**Sean F. Counihan**

***Lieutenant Colonel, United States Army***

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**NATO's RELEVANCE TO UNITED STATES ENDURING NATIONAL  
INTERESTS: *Time to Remove the Training Wheels but Continue to Hold the  
Handle Bars***

**by Sean F. Counihan**

***Lieutenant Colonel, United States Army Reserve***

**A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Joint Advanced Warfighting School in partial satisfaction of the requirements of a Master of Science Degree in Joint Campaign Planning and Strategy. The contents of this thesis reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Joint Forces Staff College or the Department of Defense.**

**This thesis is entirely my own work except as documented in footnotes.**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



**10 June 2016**

**Thesis Advisor:**

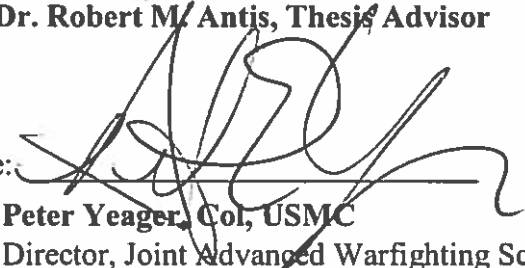
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Director, Joint Advanced Warfighting School**

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## **ABSTRACT**

From its inception in December 1950, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has been the bedrock of European security and the strategic foundation of the United States' foreign policy to the European region. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War many were quick to argue that NATO had become obsolete. Additionally, these pundits contend that NATO is out of date with current U.S. foreign policy. However, this thesis asserts that NATO continues to provide the United States the ability to protect its vital national interests globally. A strong role in NATO provides the United States a conduit and connective structure to some of the world's most stable governments, serves as the main policy mechanism by which it can influence Europe, and provides a venue for legitimacy and freedom of global action. The United States is no longer bound to provide security to NATO members by forward positioning hundreds of thousands of military forces along the Eastern European front. NATO members are developing, with the assistance of the United States, the capability to provide sufficient security with a decreased role for U.S. forces. Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR is utilized as a case study to demonstrate that while the United States is still the largest power in NATO, possessing the ability to lead and conduct full spectrum operations, there are times when leading from behind can not only benefit the alliance but also allow America to focus its assets globally in the achievement of its national interests.

This thesis proposes three recommendations for U.S. foreign policy relating to NATO and the achievement of its national interests:

- 1) The United States must support selective NATO enlargement to assure the world that the alliance is not only a major player in the security and defense of the European Continent but also globally.

- 2) The United States must demonstrate its commitment to NATO by continuing to invest in the alliance, ensuring enhanced security and defense capabilities of member nations.
- 3) The United States must continue to provide strong leadership in NATO, while training and increasing the capacity of member nations to take the lead in small scale operations.

NATO remains of vital importance to United States enduring national security interests and remains central to its national strategies. Therefore, it is essential that the United States continues to play a lead role in the in the strongest alliance the world has ever known.



## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my “motivation and inspiration”, my beautiful wife Tecia and my amazing son Brendan. Tecia you are my wife, partner, best friend, and senior NCO (retired) who keeps me going. You are my motivation to continue to work hard to achieve my full potential and to never settle for less. You have gracefully led our family through thick and thin throughout the years and your loving support during all my endeavors has not gone unnoticed. I don’t know where I would be without you but I do know I would not be this successful or happy, thank you “Pookie.” To my son Brendan, who has sacrificed birthdays, holidays, and precious time as I have pursued a career in the United States military, you are my inspiration. You have been there since the day I raised my right hand, and have been by my side for almost every promotion and accolade. I have watched you grow into a fine young man and I am so proud to call you my son. Thank you for your unselfishness and understanding during these last 27 years and those still to come. Additionally, I dedicate this thesis to the rest of my perfect blended family: Tyler, Tricia, Nicholas, Daniel, and the latest addition Maleeya. Your support during my military career has been unwavering and I know your mother/Tecia is always in good hands when duty calls me away. I love you all and appreciate your support.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to offer special thanks to my advisors Dr. Robert Antis and Colonel Peter Yeager without whose advice, patience, challenge, and direction, the ideas presented in this thesis would not have been developed. Additional thanks is warranted for the Seminar 3 faculty: Dr. S. Mike Pavelec, COL Chris Rogers, and Capt. Miguel “Boo” Peko. Your mentorship, knowledge, and experience have been of great benefit to my development as a Military Officer and a strategic scholar. I would also like to thank Mr. Jeffrey Turner from the Joint Force Staff College (JFSC) Writing Center, and the great staff of the JFSC Library for facilitating the availability of resources so I could conduct the detailed research required for this thesis. Lastly, a special thanks to the “Bulldogs” of Seminar 3, your thoughts, advice, and friendship will have a lasting and positive effect on not only my military career but also my professional & personal life after the Army. Tecia and I sincerely thank you for taking care of this “Geo-Bachelor” during Academic Year 2015/2016.

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## INTRODUCTION

From its inception in December 1950 the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has been the bedrock of European security and the strategic foundation of the United States' foreign policy in the European region. For forty years NATO was responsible for deterring Soviet aggression and keeping peace on the European continent. The North Atlantic Treaty, signed in April 1949, tied the United States and its nuclear capability to Europe and provided for the mutual defense between America and its western European allies.<sup>1</sup> When the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact brought an end to the Cold War, NATO found itself with an identity crisis.<sup>2</sup> During the last fifteen years NATO reinvented itself by expanding its scope and vision to respond to crises outside of its European borders as it adapted to the challenges of the twenty-first century. In 2010 NATO published its most current Strategic Concept in which one of its focuses is towards areas of strategic importance outside of the European continent.<sup>3</sup>

From the United States' perspective, some experts contend that NATO is out of date with current United States foreign policy. James Goldgeier stated that "if NATO didn't exist today, the United States would not seek to create it."<sup>4</sup> Magnus Petersson further asserts that within the United States legislative branch there is a generation of American policy makers who do not share the same Eurocentric view as their

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Antis, *The Reinvention of NATO*, (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Services, 2006), 1.

<sup>2</sup> David M. Andrews, "The United States and Its Atlantic Partners: The Evolution of American Grand Strategy," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 17, no. 3, (October 2004): 427.

<sup>3</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Active Engagement, Modern Defence", *Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation*, (November 2010): 3.

<sup>4</sup> James M. Goldgeier, "The Future of NATO." *International Institutions and Global Governance Program*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, (February 2010): 3, [http://www.cfr.org/content/publications/attachments/NATO\\_CSR51.pdf](http://www.cfr.org/content/publications/attachments/NATO_CSR51.pdf). (accessed September 2, 2015).

predecessors, which will ultimately cause NATO's irrelevancy.<sup>5</sup> Additional arguments that have amplified the potential for the alliances' demise within United States Foreign Policy include the assertion that the United States endures a disproportionate amount of the burden sharing of Europe's collective defense in relation to the benefits it receives; the fall of Soviet communism in Eastern Europe; and the recent rebalance of the United States defense strategy to the Pacific.

With the recent events in Eastern Europe, the Syrian migration crisis, and Russia's actions in Crimea, Ukraine, and Syria, the debate on the future of NATO within the United States' foreign policy has gained more intensity. The issue of Europe's collective defense has become more of a strategic priority in the last eighteen months than it has been in the last twenty years. NATO is the United States' major influencing apparatus in Europe and its connection to some of the most stable governments and economies in the world.<sup>6</sup> The United States cannot afford to allow other global regions to affect its partnership with some of its most loyal allies. The United States is still the largest power within NATO and thus fulfills the leadership role for the organization. Even with the rise of the European Union (EU) and its Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), the EU does not have the military capability at this point to fulfill that obligation. However, NATO does have the capability (primarily due to United States military readiness) and experience, which makes this topic relevant to the current and emerging strategic environment.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Magnus Petersson, *The US-NATO Debate: From Libya to Ukraine*, (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 6.

<sup>6</sup> Goldgeier, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Guillaume Parmentier, "Redressing NATO's Imbalances," *Survival* 42, no. 2, (Summer 2000): 104.



Due to the current global strategic environment, this thesis argues that it is essential for the United States to continue to play a leading role in NATO. A strong role in NATO provides the United States a conduit and connective structure to some of the world's most stable governments, serves as the main policy mechanism by which it can influence Europe, and provides a venue for legitimacy and freedom of global action. Additionally, the United States must continue to exert pressure on NATO members to develop their defense capabilities, conduct more regional and global security operations, and lastly, meet the organization's mandated defense spending benchmark of two percent of the member nation's gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>8</sup>

### *Methodology*

The primary methodology of this thesis will be to use published documentation on the historical, and current relations between NATO and United States. It is important to understand how the state of this relationship, whether amicable or tenuous, affects United States' foreign policy decisions. This thesis will analyze the United States' participation in operations in Libya in 2011 as a case study for its argument. Specific emphasis will focus on the United States' interaction with NATO members in the conduct of Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR (March - October 2011) and evaluate whether these actions demonstrate a shift in the United States' view of its role within the alliance in the future. Additional research of published documentation on the current and emerging strategic environment, to include the potential actions of adversaries against the alliance will be used to formulate the argument of supporting NATO's relevance to United States' foreign policy. Materials will include published books, government sponsored studies,

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<sup>8</sup> Petersson, *The U.S.- NATO Debate*, 32.

magazine and journal articles, and current news articles. The aforementioned documentation is the foundation for this thesis' argument and supports the recommendations presented in the last chapter.

### ***Relevance***

Since this thesis is primarily based on the relevance of NATO to the United States' enduring national interests, it is important to define the term "relevance" in relation to this argument. Merriam-Webster defines relevance as: a) relation to the matter at hand; and b) practical and especially socially applicable.<sup>9</sup> For this thesis, relevance is more about the connection (or relation to the matter) of NATO goals and objectives to U.S. national interests as stated in the National Security Strategy of the United States of America. These four enduring national interests will be discussed in the next chapter but can best be summed up with: Protection, Prosperity, Preservation, and Promotion.

In addition to defining relevance in relation to NATO and United States enduring national interests, this paper will discuss how that relevance should affect United States foreign policy decision-making not only in Europe, but globally as well. Derek Chollet, a former United States assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, does a nice job of summing up the question of relevance when he states: "the question isn't whether NATO is relevant, but what is it relevant for?"<sup>10</sup> Mr. Chollet further asserts that Russia's re-emergence and its actions in the Ukraine, coupled with the migration crisis affecting central Europe and the Balkans, demonstrates the need for a strong NATO.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Merriam-Webster, *Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary*, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/relevance>, (accessed October 14, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Steven Erlanger, "NATO Nations No Longer Question Need for Alliance," *New York Times*, December 15, 2015, under "Memo from Europe," [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/16/world/europe/nato-nations-no-longer-question-need-for-alliance.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/16/world/europe/nato-nations-no-longer-question-need-for-alliance.html?_r=0) (accessed December 16, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

## ***Road Map***

This introduction provides a brief overview of the history and current situation surrounding NATO in relation to United States foreign policy and the achievement of enduring national interests. Additionally, a brief snapshot of the current global security environment as well as the methodology used to form this thesis was presented. Lastly, the term relevance was defined and further broken down to illustrate its specific use in the formulation of the argument and corresponding recommendations.

Moving forward in the discussion, chapter one describes how the United States enduring national interests, as spelled out in the President's 2015 National Security Strategy, coincide with United States – NATO relations. Chapter two argues NATO's relevance to United States' national interests, and the weight that should be given to the alliance in future foreign policy decisions by critically comparing both sides of the relevance argument. Chapter three is solely dedicated to the case study of United States and NATO operations in the 2011 Libyan Civil War. The chapter provides a brief background into the events surrounding the war, initial United States actions, the transition to Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR, and subsequent NATO members' participation in the operation. This chapter concludes by discussing the United States policy shift to "leading from behind." Chapter four provides recommendations to guide United States' interaction with the alliance. This sections lays out three specific recommendations and provides justification of their validity. Finally, the conclusion section of this document will provide a quick overview of the information presented and restate the thesis and recommendations.

## CHAPTER 1:

### ENDURING NATIONAL INTERESTS

Joseph Nye asserts that “National interests are the fundamental building blocks in any discussion of foreign policy.”<sup>1</sup> Based on this statement, in order for NATO to remain relevant, United States national interests must be a priority in its relationship with the alliance. Nye further states, “In a democracy, the national interest is simply the set of shared priorities regarding relations with the rest of the world.”<sup>2</sup> Condoleezza Rice agreed with his theory when she opined “the United States does have permanent allies: the nations with whom we share common values.”<sup>3</sup> For the last sixty-five years the United States and its fellow NATO members have shared not only common values but also national interests. The United States 2015 National Security Strategy spells out America’s role as the global leader in a rules based international order in collaboration with regional and international organizations.<sup>4</sup> It outlines the nation’s enduring national interests as:

- 1) The security of the United States, its citizens, and U.S. Allies and partners;
- 2) A strong, innovative, and growing U.S. economy in an open international economic system that promotes opportunity and prosperity;
- 3) Respect for universal values at home and around the world; and
- 4) A rules based international order advanced by U.S. leadership that promotes peace, security, and opportunity through stronger cooperation to meet global challenges.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Nye, “Redefining the National Interest,” *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 4, (July/August 1999): 23, <https://nduezproxy.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=1952567&site=ehost-live&scope=site> (accessed November 13, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Condoleezza Rice, “Rethinking the National Interest,” *Foreign Affairs* 87, no.4, (July/August 2008): 5.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. President, *National Security Strategy*, Washington DC: Government Printing Office, (February 2015), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 3.

In relation to the first enduring national interest of security, NATO is at its core a security and defense alliance providing hard power to the European region. President Barack Obama stated in his speech to the British Parliament in May 2011: “NATO... is rooted in Article V that no nation will have to fend on its own; that allies will stand for one another always, and for the last six decades it has been the most successful alliance in the history of the world.”<sup>6,7</sup>

With regard to the second enduring national interest of prosperity, Samuel Huntington mentions the recommendations of the 1996 Commission on America’s National Interest, of which one enduring national interest was to “Prevent the collapse of the global systems for trade, financial markets, energy supplies, and the environment.”<sup>8</sup> NATO fills the role of ensuring a safe and secure economic environment in the European region. While it can be said that the European Union is the primary mechanism for economic activity on the European continent, NATO is clearly the primary military instrument that protects the United States’ economic interests with its largest trading partner (See figure 1.1).

The United States membership in NATO serves the last two enduring national interests (promotion of universal values, and rules based international order) by providing

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<sup>6</sup> Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty states: The parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area. (United States, “The North Atlantic Treaty (1949) and amendments,” (April 4, 1949), *United States Treaties and Other International Agreements*, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_17120.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm) (accessed September 1, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Magnus Petersson, *The US-NATO Debate: From Libya to Ukraine*, (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 44.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Huntington, “The Erosion of American National Interests,” *Foreign Affairs* 76, no 5. (September/October 1997): 36.

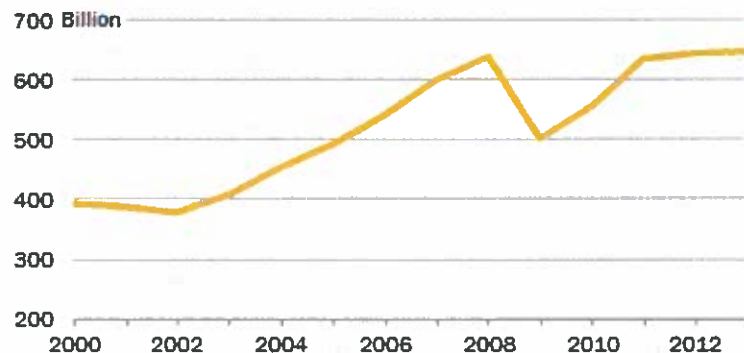
the United States with access to the world's most stable and democratic governments.

Victoria Nuland, the Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs in the United States State Department summarized the U.S.– NATO relationship well in her 2013 Swearing-in Ceremony when she said: “It is the honor of a lifetime....to have the responsibility for America’s relationship with the most democratic, prosperous, generous, and globally committed region on Earth”<sup>9</sup>

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### Transatlantic Trade on the Rise

*Total annual trade in goods between U.S. and EU in billions of U.S. dollars*



Source: U.S. Census International Trade Data.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

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Figure 1.1 Transatlantic Trade Statistics through 2012. <http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/04/09/support-in-principle-for-u-s-eu-trade-pact/> (Accessed 25 November 2015)

Being a partner within NATO also provides the United States the ability to assist and mentor nascent democracies in Eastern Europe to ensure those nations have a secure environment necessary for democracy to mature. Condoleezza Rice stated twelve of the twenty-eight NATO members are former Soviet Republics (see figure 1.2) and the effect of their membership within NATO “is felt in a renewed dedication to promoting and protecting democracy.”<sup>10</sup> Rice further asserts that it is vital to the United States’ national

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<sup>9</sup> Petersson, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Rice, 5.

interests that those democratic nations have the ability to meet the full range of security requirements in order to carry out their sovereign responsibilities.<sup>11</sup>

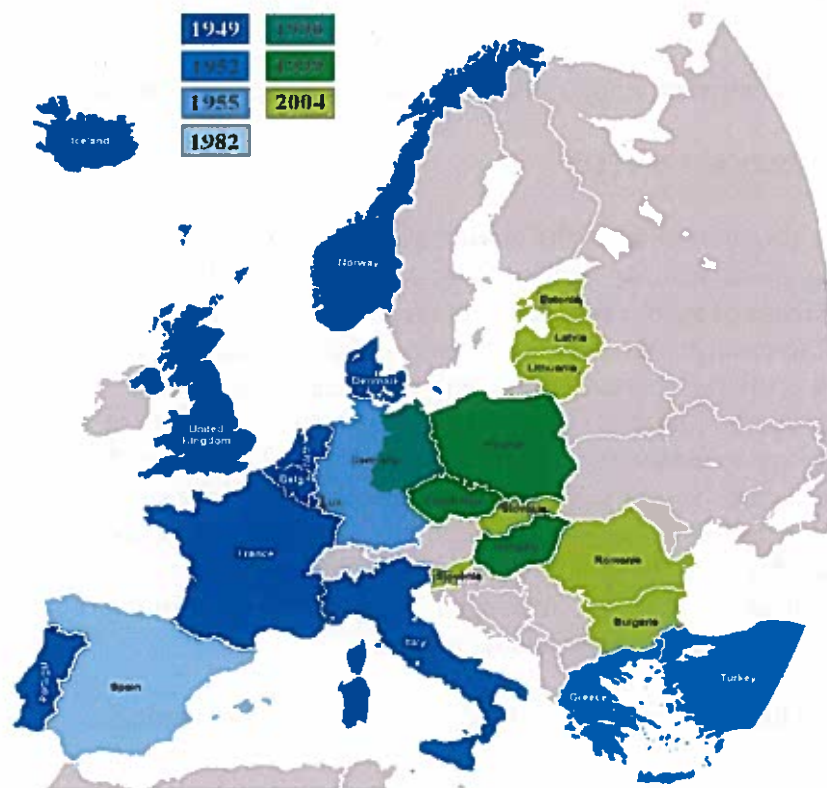


Figure 1.2, NATO Members and Year of Entry into the Alliance (Excluding the United States and Canada – both original members 1949). <http://benjaminstudebaker.com/2015/11/28/relax-turkey-and-russia-will-not-go-to-war/> (Accessed 29 November 2015).

Numerous strategic defense guidance documents are based on the preservation or achievement of enduring national interests. Most recently the strategic guidance released in January 2012, “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership - Priorities for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defense” was shaped by enduring national interests.<sup>12</sup> President Obama in his introductory comments states:

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>12</sup> Barack Obama and Leon E. Panetta, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, (Washington D.C.: Dept. of Defense, 2012), <http://purl.fdlp.gov/GPO/gpo18079> (accessed December 12, 2015), ii.

We seek the security of our Nation, allies and partners. We seek the prosperity that flows from an open and free international economic system. And we seek a just and sustainable international order where the rights and responsibilities of nations and peoples are upheld, especially the fundamental rights of every human being.<sup>13</sup>

The current National Security Strategy solidifies the relationship between America's enduring national interests and NATO:

NATO is the strongest alliance the world has ever known and is the hub of an expanding global security network. Our Article V commitment to the collective defense of all NATO Members is ironclad, as is our commitment to ensuring the Alliance remains ready and capable for crisis response and cooperative security. We will continue to deepen our relationship with the European Union (EU), which has helped to promote peace and prosperity across the region, and deepen NATO-EU ties to enhance transatlantic security. To build on the millions of jobs supported by transatlantic trade, we support a pro-growth agenda in Europe to strengthen and broaden the region's recovery, and we seek an ambitious T-TIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) to boost exports, support jobs, and raise global standards for trade.<sup>14</sup>

NATO is the United States strongest security alliance. The national interests of NATO members have a great deal in common with America's interests which in itself provides validity to the organization's role in United States foreign policy. Continuing to give primacy to NATO by playing a lead role in the alliance, the United States reassures its most stable and democratic allies that the strongest security alliance the world has ever known has a stable future. Additionally, by taking a strong leadership role in the alliance, the United States enhances its strategic reach in the pursuit of its enduring national interests.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., ii.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. President, *National Security Strategy*, 25.



## CHAPTER 2:

### SHOULD I GO OR SHOULD I STAY?

#### *NATO is Obsolete (I should go):*

Many foreign policy experts contend that NATO is out of date with current U.S. foreign policy. Their main argument focuses around the fall of the Soviet Union during the later stages of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some see the disproportionate amount of burden sharing the United States endures in financing Europe's collective defense in relation to the benefits it receives as a reason for the U.S. to pull away from the alliance. David Andrews provides the basis for the argument against NATO's relevance when he lays out the initial characteristics of the alliance. He uses a quote from Lord Ismay (the first Secretary General of NATO, 1952-57) who said the organization's function was to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down.<sup>1</sup> Upon reflection of the function of NATO, to blunt Soviet influence and presence, while keeping American engaged in Western Europe remains germane and validates the statement of the first Secretary General. But with the fall of the Berlin Wall, which signified the beginning of the end to Soviet rule on the continent, there is substantial weight to the argument that Europe is less vulnerable to hostile actions and thus needs less U.S. military involvement to preserve its security. This argument is strengthened by the fact that most NATO members do not meet the required 2% of GDP target for defense spending (see figure 2.1).<sup>2</sup> National Security pundits are quick to point to these figures and protest that NATO

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<sup>1</sup> David M. Andrews, "The United States and Its Atlantic Partners: The Evolution of American Grand Strategy.", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 17, no. 3, (October 2004): 424.

<sup>2</sup> Kedar Pavgi, "NATO Member's Defense Spending in Two Charts," *DefenseOne.com*, June 22, 2015, <http://www.defenseone.com/politics/2015/06/nato-members-defense-spending-two-charts/116008/> (accessed October 14, 2015).

members receive the security benefit of the alliance while not paying the price of membership. This allows the vast majority of our NATO allies to focus on growing their economies and social programs at the expense of the U.S. budget.

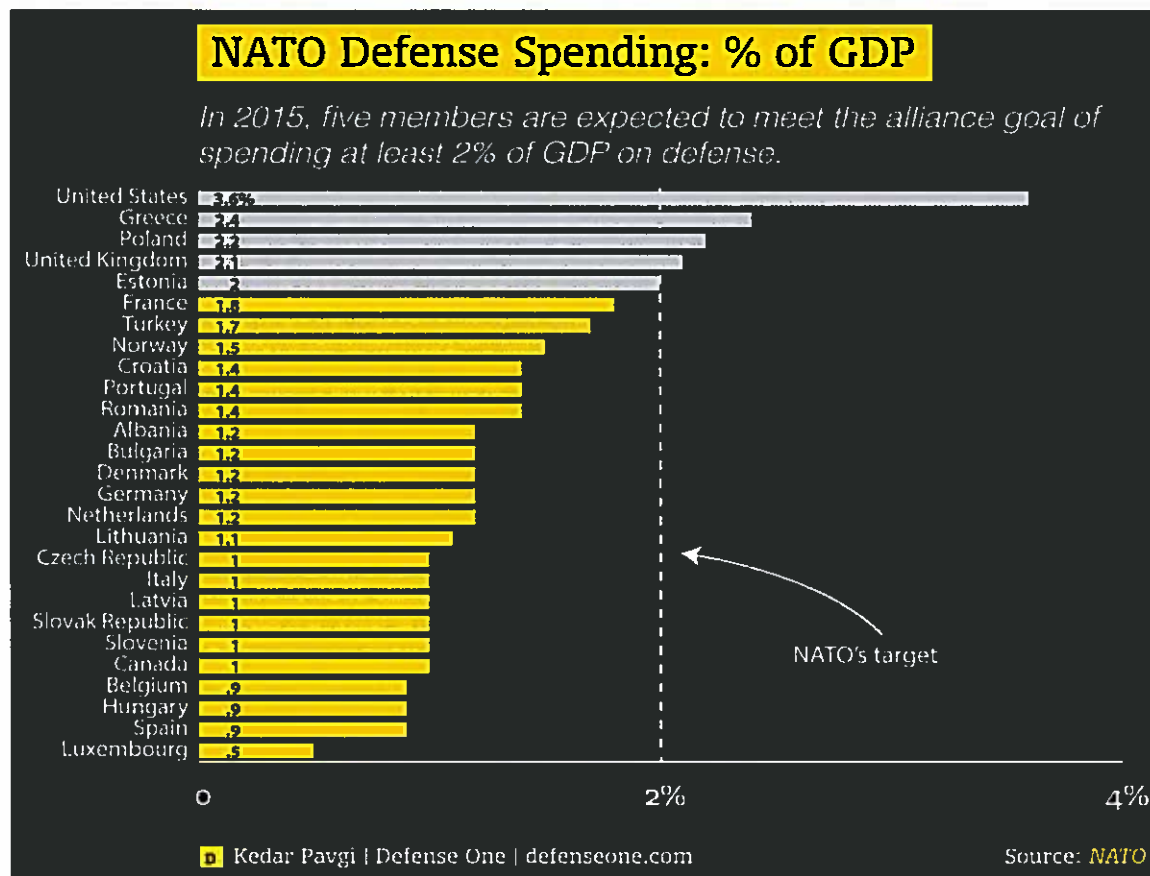


Figure 2.1, NATO Members Defense Spending – 2015: % of GDP.

<http://www.defenseone.com/politics/2015/06/nato-members-defense-spending-two-charts/116008/>  
(accessed October 14, 2015).

Isaac Kfir emphasizes this disproportionate amount of burden sharing by stating Washington's unhappiness with its European allies' commitment to share the security cost.<sup>3</sup> Kfir makes a strong argument for the European Union as an international actor, and uses the EU's 2009 Lisbon Treaty as one of the focal points for his arguments. He sees the Lisbon treaty as an attempt by the European community to challenge the United

<sup>3</sup> Isaac Kfir, "Is There Still a Need for NATO in the Twenty-First Century?", *Comparative Strategy* 34, no. 1, (January 2015): 74.

States' hegemony and uses the example of the CSDP as a means to cooperate within the community free of American involvement.<sup>4</sup> Kfir also argues that since Germany is no longer being held down, but instead is leading the EU, there is competition between it and the United States to be the primary actor on the continent. With the absence of Soviet-Warsaw Pact threats, Germany is now allowed the opportunity to challenge Washington's security assessment.<sup>5</sup> Kfir concludes that the world has outgrown NATO, and what is instead required in the current strategic environment, is the ability to engage in soft power, which the EU is in a better position to employ.

Goldgeier, for all his praise for the relevance of NATO, warns that the greatest danger to NATO is United States disinterest in the alliance. He continues this thought by stating that to keep America engaged, the Europeans need to demonstrate an understanding of the current environment and the requirement to combat the threats within it. NATO members must also recognize that Article V threats can come from outside the European region.<sup>6</sup> If and when the European members achieve these requirements and NATO continues to succeed, the United States will have a significant advantage in achieving one of its enduring national security interests of promoting international order.<sup>7</sup>

***NATO "is" Relevant (I Should Stay):***

When most people hear the term NATO, they most likely think about the Cold War and military power, but in its essence NATO is both a military and political tool.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>6</sup> James M. Goldgeier, "The Future of NATO." *International Institutions and Global Governance Program*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, (February 2010): 20-21  
[http://www.cfr.org/content/publications/attachments/NATO\\_CSR51.pdf](http://www.cfr.org/content/publications/attachments/NATO_CSR51.pdf). (accessed September 2, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 20.

Magnus Petersson asserts that to think of NATO as only a military tool is the least comprehensive and minimalist way to view the organization.<sup>8</sup> NATO's members benefit by having a forum that fosters bargaining, negotiations, and compromises on a myriad of international issues. Petersson further maintains that NATO has been and will continue to be relevant to United States foreign policy by using the organization to produce "coalitions of the willing," which provides legitimacy to U.S. global endeavors.<sup>9</sup>

The United States' strategic defense guidance issued in January of 2012 directed a refocus of defense priorities towards the Asia-Pacific region, but even with this refocus, the United States will continue to maintain its commitment to the NATO alliance. In Leon Panetta's introductory letter to the document he states: "It [U.S. Joint Force] will have a global presence emphasizing the Asia-Pacific and the Middle East while still ensuring our ability to maintain our defense commitments to Europe, and strengthening alliances and partnerships across all regions."<sup>10</sup> Panetta's comment validates NATO's relevance to the current administration's foreign policy agenda. The document further states that: "The United States has enduring interests in supporting peace and prosperity in Europe as well as bolstering the strength and vitality of NATO, which is critical to the security of Europe and beyond."<sup>11</sup> NATO continues to contribute to the United States' ability to protect vital national interests globally. The United States is no longer bound to provide security to NATO members by forward positioning hundreds of thousands of military forces along the Eastern European front. NATO members are developing, with

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<sup>8</sup> Magnus Petersson, *The US-NATO Debate: From Libya to Ukraine*, (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 9.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Barack Obama and Leon E. Panetta, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, (Washington D.C.: Dept. of Defense, 2012), <http://purl.fdlp.gov/GPO/gpo18079> (accessed December 12, 2015), iv.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

the assistance of the United States, the capability to provide sufficient security with a decreased role of United States forces. The result of these efforts is an emerging European security environment where most NATO members are now suppliers of regional security instead of consumers.<sup>12</sup>

James Goldgeier agrees that NATO is still relevant since it allows the U.S. to partner with democratic allies via a formal institution. This ability to negotiate and collaborate with some of the strongest global economies provides a venue for decision making, lends credibility to actions, and provides freedom of maneuver.<sup>13</sup> Goldgeier's report concludes that NATO is still very much relevant to United States foreign policy and provides three recommendations to substantiate his point:

- 1) NATO remains valuable to the United States and Europe, and member states should continue to invest in the alliance;
- 2) NATO should strengthen its partnerships with the European Union and non-European democracies, and
- 3) The United States should foster greater collaboration between NATO and Russia.<sup>14</sup>

Ilie and Gheorghe discuss NATO's transformation and the new NATO Strategic Concept developed and adopted by the NATO members Heads of State and Government in Lisbon, Portugal in 2010. They confirm NATO's relevance by calling the new strategic concept the "Birth Certificate" of the alliance as it responds to the current and emergent strategic environment.<sup>15</sup> In addition to reinforcing the alliance's resolve to uphold Article V, NATO will also focus on crisis management, security by cooperation, transformation of the military institution by shifting from heavy forces to more agile and

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Goldgeier, 20.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 21-22.

<sup>15</sup> Marin Ilie, Ion Gheorghe, and Ana Mona Ilie, "The New Strategic Concept NATO 2010," *Journal of Defense Resources Management* 2, no. 1, (April 2011): 55.

flexible forces, geographic reorientation by defining interests in other regions, and the development of capabilities to deal with emerging risks such as cyber-attacks, piracy and climate change.<sup>16</sup>

Petersson concludes by arguing that the United States' vision for NATO must not only be military and political, but also cultural. The United States perspective needs to take on what he calls a maximist view by using its leadership role in the alliance to promote universal values globally.<sup>17</sup> Petersson summarizes NATO's relevance when he quotes Senator Jeanne Shaheen who argued:

It would be wrong to underestimate the transatlantic influence in the international community" and that "the most open, transparent, and democratic societies in the world today, The United States and Europe still represent a model for citizens everywhere who support the rule of law and want their voices heard and their legitimate needs met.<sup>18</sup>

Even with the rise of non-traditional western states in the global balance of power, the United States is still the global hegemon and with great power comes great responsibility. The United States is currently the only country that can project power and sustain it for an extended period of time. The capabilities of the alliance are a contributing factor to allowing the United States to focus its primary efforts to other areas of strategic importance while still being able to lead NATO operations with a reduced footprint. NATO members' willingness and ability to operate both in and out of region are a force multiplier for an enhanced United States global presence.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 57-58.

<sup>17</sup> Petersson, *The U.S.-NATO Debate*, 155.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

### CHAPTER 3:

#### CASE STUDY – LIBYA

##### ***Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR***

As mentioned previously, the strategic concept developed during the Lisbon Summit in November 2010, “Active Engagement, Modern Defence,” contained three essential core tasks: collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security in areas of strategic importance to the alliance. Just over two months later, NATO’s new strategic concept was tested with its intervention in Libya. As the crisis in Libya escalated into civil war, and as the forces of dictator Muammar Gaddafi began to attack democratic protesters in February of 2011, the world took notice. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) approved resolution 1970 on February 26, 2011 expressing concern over the situation in the North African nation. As the situation in Libya continued to deteriorate the UNSC adopted resolution 1973 on March 17.<sup>1</sup> Resolution 1973 not only condemned the egregious actions of the Gaddafi Regime against the people of Libya but it also called upon regional and international organizations to protect Libyan civilians and civilian populated areas by enforcing a no-fly zone and any other means necessary (in addition to the arms embargo already in place due to UNSC resolution 1970).

On March 19, Operation ODYSSEY DAWN, a United States led multinational coalition, including nations from the Arab League and African Union, commenced enforcement of UNSCR 1973. From the onset of the operation, the Obama

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<sup>1</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “NATO & Libya,” *NATO Topic Online*, (November 9, 2015), [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_71652.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_71652.htm) (accessed on November 24, 2015).

administration conveyed its intent to transfer command to the coalition, and on March 23, NATO began the transition to take command.<sup>2</sup> On March 30, NATO officially took command of the operation and changed the name to Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR.<sup>3</sup> Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR continued for over six months and inflicted significant damage to the Gaddafi regime. The capture and subsequent killing of Muammar Gaddafi on October 20, 2011 set the conditions for the cessation of operations. Just over a month after a transitional government in Libya was recognized by the United Nations the NATO-led operation to come to a close on October 30, 2011.<sup>4</sup>

### *Leading from Behind*

The NATO-led Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR was initially seen as a success for the alliance. The United States began the operation with assistance from France and Great Britain, and within days began to transition command and control of the operation to NATO. President Barack Obama termed the United States involvement in the Libya as “Leading from behind,” and stated that “American leadership is essential but does not mean acting alone. It means shaping the conditions for the international community to act together...as more nations bear both the responsibility and the cost of enforcing international law.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah Gertler, “Operation ODYSSEY DAWN (Libya): Background and Issues for Congress,” CRS Report R41725, (Washington DC: Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, March 30, 2011), i, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R41725.pdf> (accessed December 10, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Magnus Petersson, *The US-NATO Debate: From Libya to Ukraine*, (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 29.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 49.



These comments by President Obama invoked responses from both sides of the argument in regards to American leadership in NATO. Kurt Volker was steadfast in his belief that the United States could not abandon its leadership role within NATO when he opined:

It is understandable that Americans would be frustrated that Europe does not pull more of a load. But an America that “leads from behind” is not leading at all. We must lead and bring others with us. By rejecting this role in Libya, the U.S. is allowing NATO to appear as a paper tiger. That serves no one’s interest.<sup>6</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the majority of NATO’s ability to effectively conduct operations is a result of United States military readiness.<sup>7</sup> Isaac Kfir subscribes to this notion of the limitations of a NATO operation without United States involvement when he asserts “It became abundantly clear once Italy, France, and Britain took charge of the operation that NATO lacked the capabilities to manage a multi-national operation.”<sup>8</sup>

But not all the comments were negative in regards to the United States choice to lead from behind. Harvard Professor and international relations expert Stephen Walt wrote:

Forcing NATO’s European members to take the lead in the recent Libyan war was a good first step, because the United States will never get its continental allies to bear more of the burden if it insists on doing most of the work itself. Indeed, by playing hard to get on occasion, Washington would encourage others to do more to win our support instead of resenting or rebelling against the self-appointed indispensable nation.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>7</sup> Guillaume Parmentier, “Redressing NATO’s Imbalances,” *Survival*, 42, no. 2, (Summer 2000): 104.

<sup>8</sup> Isaac Kfir, “Is There Still a Need for NATO in the Twenty-First Century?”, *Comparative Strategy* 34, no. 1, (January 2015): 78.

<sup>9</sup> Petersson, *The U.S.-NATO Debate*, 65.

Dr. Walt's view, while not popular in some circles, does bear merit. His assertion begs the question: will the United States actions in Operation ODYSSEY DAWN and subsequent transfer of command to NATO be a precursor for future actions of the organization in the European region and around the globe?

So how do United States' actions in the NATO-led operations in Libya relate to its enduring national interests? It can be argued that in the case of the Operation ODYSSEY DAWN, the two primary United States' national interests were: Respect for universal values at home and around the world; and a rules based international order advanced by U.S. leadership that promotes peace, security, and opportunity through stronger cooperation to meet global challenges. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates confirmed the argument that the actions in Libya promoted United States national interests and collective security by stating to the House of Representatives in March 2011 that the United States acted "as part of the multi-lateral coalition with broad international support to prevent a humanitarian crisis that could have destabilized the entire region."<sup>10</sup>

The NATO-led operations in Libya proved to the United States, and the world, that the Lisbon Summit strategic concept was not just wishful thinking, but an agreement by the alliance to operate outside of the European continent in areas of strategic importance. The actions by more than a few member nations ratified the alliance's intention of becoming a globally focused NATO.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 24.

## CHAPTER 4:

### RECOMMENDATIONS

As stated earlier, many experts predicted the end of NATO when the Cold War ended and the wall came down. Stephen Walt asserts that “Alliances formed during wartime will disintegrate when the enemy is defeated” or as in the case of the Cold War, when the enemy no longer exists and/or poses a threat.<sup>1</sup> But over the last twenty-five years, NATO has continued to demonstrate resiliency by evolving to meet the needs of its members in a nascent global security environment. With the current security environment in Eastern Europe, Middle East, and North Africa, the issue of Europe’s collective defense is worth listing as a strategic priority more so in the last eighteen months than it has been in the last twenty years.

So how does or how should the alliance relate to the achievement of American national interests moving forward? Luke Coffey states that the United States’ commitment is no longer about deterring the threat of the Soviet Union, but it is more about “ensuring America’s strategic reach in Eurasia, Africa, and the Middle East.”<sup>2</sup> Senator Shaheen echoed these sentiments when she described NATO as being “Fundamentally critical to transatlantic security interests around the globe.”<sup>3</sup> Her comments further solidify NATO’s vital role in the United States’ ability to sustain its enduring national interests abroad. But as James Goldgeier alluded, “if NATO fails to

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen M. Walt, *The Origin of Alliances*, Ithaca, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1987), 32.

<sup>2</sup> Luke Coffey, “Five Principles That Should Guide U.S. Policy Toward NATO,” *The Heritage Foundation - Issue Brief on North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, no. 3536, (March 8, 2012): 1, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/03/5-principles-that-should-guide-us-policy-toward-nato> (accessed November 18, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Magnus Petersson, *The US-NATO Debate: From Libya to Ukraine*, (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 37.

accept a growing global role, then the United States will lose interest in investing in the alliances future.”<sup>4</sup> Thus it is essential for the United States to continue to provide strong leadership within NATO to ensure the advancement of its enduring national interests.<sup>5</sup>

Even though the United States is refocusing its defense priorities to other regions around the globe, it must continue to remain engaged in Europe. Recent actions by Vladimir Putin in Syria and Ukraine have alerted the alliance that Russia still retains the ability to threaten security and stability in the region.<sup>6</sup> It was stated earlier that when the alliance was founded, two of the primary purposes of NATO were to keep Russia out of Western Europe and America engaged in the continent. For the first forty years of the alliance the United States invested significant force structure in the Western European region. It can be argued that this investment of manpower and equipment played a noteworthy role in the Soviet decision making calculus and thus had a deterrent effect on any potential aggressive actions against NATO members. The largest number of troops the United States had in Europe (during the height of the Cold War) was approximately 400,000 ground combat forces, 40,000 Sailors, and upwards of 800 aircraft.<sup>7</sup> The majority of the ground combat forces were highly mobile and trained to rapidly deploy to engage and defeat an invasion into Western Europe by Soviet forces. However, with the end of the Cold War and the drawdown of American troops in Europe over the last

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<sup>4</sup> James M. Goldgeier, “The Future of NATO,” *International Institutions and Global Governance Program*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, (February 2010) 4.

[http://www.cfr.org/content/publications/attachments/NATO\\_CSR51.pdf](http://www.cfr.org/content/publications/attachments/NATO_CSR51.pdf). (accessed September 2, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Coffey, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Michael R. Fenzel and Aaron Picozzi, “Now is the Time to Strengthen NATO’s Resolve,” *Defense in Depth*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2015, <http://blogs.cfr.org/davidson/author/mfenzel/> (accessed December 2, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Helen Cooper and Steven Erlanger, “Military Cuts Render NATO Less Formidable as Deterrent to Russia,” *New York Times*, under “Europe,” March 26, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/27/world/europe/military-cuts-render-nato-less-formidable-as-deterrent-to-russia.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/27/world/europe/military-cuts-render-nato-less-formidable-as-deterrent-to-russia.html?_r=0) (accessed November 24, 2015).

twenty-five years, current United States forces in Europe are 85% smaller than at their height in the 1980's.<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, the forces that remain do not possess the means to deploy rapidly in the region to defeat any potential security threat. A major incursion into Europe by Russian forces today would require the strategic deployment of Continental United States (CONUS) based forces to the European continent, requiring from forty-eight hours for light infantry or thirty to forty-five days for heavy maneuver brigades to arrive and prepare to fight. Mr. Richard Dannett, the former chief of staff of the British armed forces, suggested that with a rising Russia “this is a poor moment for the U.S.-led west to be weak in resolve and muscle,” and further indicated that even though other elements of national power might be working to deter Russia currently, at some time Putin is going to test the waters to see where “the real check on his actions will be.”<sup>9</sup>

So what should the United States do to ensure NATO's relevance to advancing its enduring national interests? This thesis proposes three recommendations for United States foreign policy with regard to NATO and the achievement of national interests:

- 1) The United States needs to support selective NATO enlargement to assure the world that the alliance is not only a major player in the security and defense of the European Continent but also globally.
- 2) The United States must demonstrate its commitment to NATO by continuing to invest in the alliance by building the security and defense capabilities of member nations.
- 3) The United States must continue to provide strong leadership in NATO, while enhancing the capacity of member nations to take the lead in small scale operations.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

### ***Recommendation 1:***

The United States needs to support NATO enlargement to demonstrate to the world that the alliance continues to be the major actor in collective defense and security on the European continent. Article X of the original North Atlantic Treaty approved in 1949 provides the foundation for the open door policy adopted by the alliance for enlargement.<sup>10</sup> Since 1949 the alliance has expanded its membership from the original twelve members to its current size of twenty-eight. Twelve of the additional sixteen members are from former Soviet Republics or Warsaw Pact nations. All twelve of these nations joined the alliance after the end of the Cold War, with Croatia being the last member to gain accession into NATO. The current process to become a member of the security alliance was established at the Washington Summit in 1999. The Membership Action Plan (MAP) was developed by the organization during this summit to assist and prepare aspiring countries for membership into the security alliance.<sup>11</sup> There are numerous objectives for aspiring nations to achieve before receiving a formal invitation into NATO, but a few of the major requirements are: “a functioning democratic political system based on a market economy; the fair treatment of minorities; a commitment to peaceful disputes with neighbors; the ability and willingness to make a military contribution to the alliance; and a commitment to the democratic control of the armed

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<sup>10</sup> Article X of the North Atlantic Treaty states: “The Parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty...” (United States, “The North Atlantic Treaty (1949) and amendments,” (April 4, 1949), *United States Treaties and Other International Agreements*, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_17120.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm) (accessed September 1, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Public Diplomacy Division, “*NATO Handbook*,” (Brussels: Belgium, 2006), 189.

forces.”<sup>12</sup> Lastly, participation in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) are essential for membership into the alliance.<sup>13</sup>

The most recent nation to navigate the path toward NATO membership is Montenegro, which began the process soon after it claimed independence in 2006. Approval for Montenegro to participate in the MAP was granted in December 2009 and the process lasted for six years. On December 2, 2015 NATO formally invited Montenegro to join the alliance, the first such offer since Croatia received its formal invitation in 2008. Barring any significant road blocks, Montenegro could receive full accession in the alliance by the end of summer 2016.

As mentioned earlier, NATO is the strongest and arguably most effective security alliance the world has ever known. Supporting NATO enlargement into Eastern Europe and Scandinavia will not only increase the security capability of the alliance but also the organization’s credibility. Enlargement provides enhanced legitimacy of actions throughout the European region and globally. In addition to collective security benefits of enlargement, many former Soviet sponsored countries will have a direct line to the most stable democratic governments in the world.<sup>14</sup> Membership in the alliance provides these young, nascent democracies a conduit for mentorship and collaboration as their governments and economies mature. Proponents of enlargement agree with the comments made by President Bill Clinton in May 1997 (United States Military Academy

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<sup>12</sup> Public Diplomacy Division, “*NATO in Focus*,” (Brussels: Belgium, March 2013), 35.

<sup>13</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “NATO Summit – Membership Action Plan,” *NATO Press Release NAC-S (99)66*, (April 24, 1999), <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1999/p99-066e.htm> (accessed February 14, 2016)

<sup>14</sup> Ted Galen Carpenter and Barbara Conry, *NATO Enlargement*, (Washington DC: CATO Institute, 1998), 13.

commencement speech): “NATO can do for Europe’s East what it did for Europe’s West at the end of World War II – provide a secure climate where freedom, democracy, and prosperity can flourish.”<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, there are challenges and risks involved with enlargement. A couple of the challenges of enlargement are that it can also lead to a change in the dynamics of decision-making, and disturb the effectiveness of security capabilities.<sup>16</sup>

When discussing the change in the dynamics of decision making, it is important to highlight that NATO has always operated as a consensus based organization. This has worked well for the alliance over the years but it does have its problems. Pundits opposed to enlargement argue that Eastern European (former Soviet Bloc) nations have a diverse culture which is distinct from the Cold War NATO members. Additionally, some of these Eastern European nations have historical border and ethnic disputes that date back centuries (e.g., the Balkans). By allowing these nations into the alliance, the United States could find itself dragged into more peacekeeping and humanitarian missions on the continent. The best way to mitigate this challenge is to ensure that the benchmarks set forth by the alliance for membership are stringently enforced. By setting and upholding the standard, aspiring members understand the price of membership. Additionally, in regards to the consensus building challenge, while it is primarily a security alliance, NATO has major political purposes as well. Diplomacy, negotiation, and bargaining are key to ensuring the consensus forum stays in place. With new members and more diverse

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Antis, *The Reinvention of NATO*, (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Services, 2006), 247.



cultures there is a possibility that a feuding nation possesses the ability to delay or defeat a very important and legitimate resolution or action.

The second challenge is the potential to disturb the effectiveness of security capabilities. There is the possibility of a new member nation lacking the organic capability to provide for its own national security, let alone contribute to the alliance's collective security. This could result in the further disbursement of scarce security resources across a larger area. This in turn could lead to the diminished effectiveness of the alliance's ability to defend its eastern border. The best way to counter this is twofold. First, ensure that aspiring NATO members are achieving the benchmark of 2% of GDP on defense spending before formally inviting them into the alliance. This not only enhances the defense readiness of the new member nation, but also the alliance's collective defense as a whole. Furthermore, the larger members of the organization (i.e. the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany) need to assist in building those partner nations' capacity by encouraging direct foreign investment from the private sector. In addition to upgrading those allies' defense infrastructure, NATO as a whole must ensure these nations are regularly engaged in multinational training exercises. These two items will enhance interoperability between the nations and increase the alliances overall readiness.

The principal risk involved with NATO enlargement is Russia's perception of it and its potential response to the alliance. The greatest threat to the United States national security interests is a rising and unpredictable Russia. Vladimir Putin's rhetoric, Russian actions in Ukraine and potential actions in Eastern Europe, the Baltics, and the Scandinavian region, pose a risk to the viability of the North Atlantic alliance.

International relations experts have asserted that by NATO expanding into Eastern Europe, especially the Baltics, increases the potential the United States may become militarily engaged in responsive actions in the region. Moreover, Russia has deep rooted cultural and economic ties to many of those countries and views the region as its “geopolitical backyard.”<sup>17</sup> Most recently, Russia has threatened Sweden and Finland with consequences “of the military kind” if those nations join NATO.<sup>18</sup> Those statements made by Putin’s Russia have international relations scholars balking at NATO enlargement, underscoring the implications of article V due to the heightened chance of conflict between the two Cold War powers. While there is the substantial credence to this risk, there are ways to mitigate it.

First, the alliance must ensure that it is not actively recruiting former Soviet Republics, especially those who share a border with Russia. It is a stated policy of the organization that while “enlargement is not an aim in itself, but a means of extending security further afield and making Europe as a whole more stable.”<sup>19</sup> The current open door policy of the alliance sets the conditions that any European nation that chooses to join NATO will be given serious consideration only if the nation meets specific criteria set forth in the MAP. Only under those conditions will a nation be considered for membership in NATO and subsequently, when that nation proves it has met the requisite benchmarks for membership will the organization vote to admit the nation into the alliance. While both Sweden and Finland are nowhere near applying for membership in

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<sup>17</sup> Carpenter and Conry, 3.

<sup>18</sup> Jorge Benitez, “The Bully to the East: Russia is trying to scare Sweden and Finland away from joining NATO,” *U.S. News and World Report Online*, August 6, 2015, <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/world-report/2015/08/06/russia-bullies-sweden-and-finland-away-from-joining-nato> (accessed December 9, 2015).

<sup>19</sup>Public Diplomacy Division, “*NATO in Focus*,” 34.

NATO in the near future, the subject of membership within the alliance is gaining intensity and popular support among the citizens of both countries. These two countries are ideally suited both militarily and geographically for membership, and diplomatic efforts should be undertaken to exploit this opportunity to lure these two nations into the alliance. It should also be noted that both countries, in light of recent Russian threats and vague actions, have voted to increase their defense spending over the next four years.

The second mitigation strategy is that the United States and NATO members must keep the diplomatic dialogue with Russia open and free flowing. United States diplomats need to assure Russia that its national interests in a free and prosperous Eastern European region, where there is respect for universal values and a rules based international order, are mutually beneficial to both countries. Membership in NATO provides enhanced economic and physical security to new member nations and should not be viewed as a threat to Russian security. As members of the alliance, those nations will become more stable, economically and physically, which will subsequently result in Russia's enhanced physical and economic stability as well. It could be argued that approach might seem a little naïve based on historical evidence of Russia's desire to disrupt the United States-led international order. Russia has consistently demonstrated power and security oriented national interests and thus is unlikely to respond favorably to United States expansion of values based interests into Eastern Europe. Recently, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, stated that the importance of continual dialogue with Russia. Mr. Stoltenberg highlighted the need for transparency in the alliance's actions to mitigate the risk of Russian misperceptions. Additionally, the Secretary General indicated that while NATO does not want to revert back to a Cold War relationship with Russia, it will

respond to hostile actions swiftly, and specified that “defense and dialogue” is the key to regional security.<sup>20</sup> Obviously, this will be a difficult task since there is a sixty-five year history of distrust between Russia and NATO but this is a task that is too important to ignore.

Lastly, NATO enlargement affords the United States enhanced strategic reach by increasing cooperation with new members which fosters improved access to some of the most unstable regions in the world (e.g., Eastern Europe, the Caucasuses, the Middle East, and North Africa.) Sweden and Finland are two countries that would provide the United States and NATO enhanced strategic reach to the Baltic region. Tensions between the Baltic NATO members and Russia are on display daily. Russian military exercises, which include air and maritime incursions have increased on the border of the Baltic nations over the last three years and show no signs of decreasing in the near future.<sup>21</sup> Sweden and Finland have strategic geographical importance in the case of a cross border excursion by Russia into any of the Baltic nations. While neither of these Scandinavian countries are members of the alliance, access to their territory and airspace are imperative to the effective defense of the Baltic region.<sup>22</sup> With an enlarged NATO, the United States has the ability to base security forces in a partner nation allowing for rapid response to crises that require immediate attention.

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<sup>20</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “NATO Secretary General Calls for More Defence and More Dialogue,” *NATO Topic Online*, February 13, 2016, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_128069.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_128069.htm) (accessed on February 14, 2016).

<sup>21</sup> Heritage Foundation, “U.S. Comprehensive Strategy Toward Russia,” Edited by James Jay Carafano, *Davis Institute for National Security and Foreign Policy, Special Report*, No. 173, (Washington DC: December 9, 2015), 19.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

As the United States reduces its footprint in Europe in an effort to decrease its overseas expenditures and force NATO nations to assume more of an active role in the collective security of the alliance, there will be the opportunity to work with the new NATO nations on assured access of U.S. forces. These forces do not need to be permanently based in these countries but rather rotated through on training and security cooperation missions while maintaining the ability to conduct rapid crisis response and humanitarian operations. By forward projecting these forces, the United States increases its ability to achieve its first enduring national interest of the security of the homeland, its citizens, allies, and partner nations.

***Recommendation 2:***

The United States must continue to remain committed to the alliance. America must continue to invest in the alliance and ensure member nations have the capability and training necessary to conduct security and collective defense operations in the absence of large scale U.S. forces. With the current administration's rebalance to the Pacific, America needs to ensure the security needs of the European continent can be achieved while allowing U.S. forces the ability to effectively defeat threats around the globe. Former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, during his speech in Canada in 2011, stated:

But in an effort to maintain our excellence and our leadership, we also have to meet our security commitments around the world. And in doing that, we must, and we will, sharpen the application of our resources better, and better deploy our forces in the world, and share our burdens more and more effectively with our partners. And frankly, all of our allies need to do the same.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Petersson, *The U.S.-NATO Debate*, 48.

The United States recently demonstrated its understanding in the importance of a stable and secure Eastern Europe when it significantly increased its financial commitment to the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) fourfold by contributing \$3.4 million for fiscal year 2017.<sup>24</sup> These funds will not only be used to upgrade the security infrastructure along Europe's eastern border but also provide for additional United States equipment and defense assets.

In addition to this influx of capital into the ERI the United States needs to reinstitute the missile defense program with Eastern European NATO nations. Currently, due to Russia's modernization of its nuclear capabilities, these member nations are vulnerable to attacks from Moscow's nuclear arsenal.<sup>25</sup> The United States and NATO need to embolden the Eastern European allies to develop and modernize their ballistic missile and anti-access area denial (A2AD) capabilities as well. It is imperative that the United States be a key player in this process through cooperation and collaboration with these nations. In doing so the United States can ensure that, when appropriate, these systems will possess enhanced interoperability with U.S. weapon systems.<sup>26</sup> The greatest risk to this measure is a violent response from Moscow. Putin has condemned such actions and promised retaliatory action if the alliance moves forward with these plans. It is time for NATO and the United States to hold firm and not let Putin's rhetoric dissuade them from taking actions to improve the security of the eastern border of the alliance.

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<sup>24</sup>Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "At NATO, Pentagon Chief Says He Needs More from Allies in ISIS Fight," *Washington Post*, February 9, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2016/02/09/at-nato-pentagon-chief-says-alliance-is-now-a-deterrent-needs-more-from-allies-in-isis-fight/> (accessed February 10, 2016).

<sup>25</sup> Heritage Foundation, 13.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

Additionally, the alliance needs to conduct a strong public affairs campaign to inform the world of Russia's violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF). Doing this will increase the global pressure on Russia and Putin's regime to act in accordance with international norms. How Putin will react to this is yet to be seen. Moscow has demonstrated that it does not mind going against the international norm, but by NATO and the United States contributing to the missile defense systems in Eastern Europe and confronting Russia diplomatically, there is an increased chance of successfully staring down Vladimir Putin. As Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter asserted, "these assets are key for how NATO will move forward from reassuring its allies to deterring future aggressors."<sup>27</sup>

As mentioned earlier many NATO members are not meeting the requisite spending on their national defense of 2% of GDP, but there is room for hope in the future. Per figure 2.1, five member nations met the 2% threshold in 2015 which is a slight increase from 2014, and better than the alliance average from 1999-2009 during which period only three member nations averaged at or above 2%. Recently, nine NATO nations met in Romania to discuss the current crises facing Central and Eastern Europe. Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg took advantage of this forum to highlight the pending reduction of additional United States forces from the continent and to stress the need for member nations to increase their defense spending and posture in light of the recent Russian actions, ongoing terrorist threats, and mass migration crisis.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Gibbons-Neff.

<sup>28</sup> Fenzel and Picozzi.

Even with these factors there are several successful NATO operations absent United States' involvement currently being conducted in the European region and around the globe. These operations are perfect opportunities for the alliance to exploit and set the framework for future actions. By participating in these operations, NATO members gain relevant experience which can be effectively applied to contingency and crisis action missions globally. Two excellent examples of NATO operations not led by the United States that provide the opportunity for America to focus its efforts elsewhere are: Operation ACTIVE ENDEAVOUR and Operation OCEAN SHIELD.

*Operation ACTIVE ENDEAVOUR:* For the last fourteen years NATO nations have had an active presence in the Mediterranean Sea patrolling and monitoring one of the busiest maritime shipping routes in the world. These patrols have deterred, denied, and disrupted maritime terrorist activity in the region. This operation is one of eight measures implemented by NATO immediately following the September 11, 2001 attacks against the United States. The operation, NATO's only Article V operation, began in October 2001 for the purpose of supporting the United States and to demonstrate the alliance's steadfastness in the fight against terrorism.<sup>29</sup> Operation Active Endeavour also provided a platform to conduct impromptu humanitarian relief and rescue operations as well as foster enhanced cooperation with non-member nations and interagency partnerships.

*Operation OCEAN SHIELD:* NATO's primary counter-piracy operation since 2008 patrols and monitors the Gulf of Aden and the waters around the Horn of Africa to deter and disrupt piracy in the maritime commons from northern tip of Madagascar, around the

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<sup>29</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Operation ACTIVE ENDEAVOUR," *NATO Topic Online*, (March 26, 2015), [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_7932.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_7932.htm) (accessed on December 29, 2015).



Horn of Africa, and along the southeast coast of Saudi Arabia to the Strait of Hormuz (See figure 4.1.) This operation has been extended until the end of 2016 and acts in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2020.<sup>30</sup>



Figure 4.1, Operation OCEAN SHIELD Area of Operations.  
<http://www.mc.nato.int/about/Pages/Operation%20Ocean%20Shield.aspx> (accessed 6 January 2016).

These examples demonstrate the importance of continued United States investment in NATO to build partner capacity, which allows members to provide for the common defense and security of the European Continent through the conduct of global operations without U.S. support.

<sup>30</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Counter-Piracy Operations," *NATO Topic Online*, March 26, 2015, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_48815.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_48815.htm?selectedLocale=en) (accessed on December 29, 2015).

### ***Recommendation 3:***

The United States needs to continue to provide strong leadership in the alliance. NATO has been and will continue to be the United States' conduit and connective structure to some of the world's most stable governments and serves as the main policy mechanism to influence Europe. The United States has always been the foundation of NATO's military strength and readiness, and America needs to reassure the alliance that it will continue to uphold its security commitments to the region. Even with four other member nations currently meeting the 2% threshold and seven others increasing their defense budgets in the near future, the United States still accounts for approximately 75% of the alliance's aggregate defense spending.<sup>31</sup>

During the Cold War, the United States was the main effort in deterring Soviet aggression in Western Europe. Fast forward to current times, replace the name Soviet Union with Russia, and the same argument can be made. Even with a significantly reduced presence, the United States is still the standard bearer for the organization. The United States European Command Commander is still dual-hatted as the NATO Supreme Allied Commander in Europe (as has been the case since General Dwight Eisenhower first held the position from 1951-1952), providing validity to the argument that NATO is still a United States-led organization. While other member nations are building the capacity to lead, and some have smaller scale peacekeeping and humanitarian operational

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<sup>31</sup> Steven Erlanger, "NATO Nations No Longer Question Need for Alliance," *New York Times*, December 15, 2015, under "Memo from Europe," [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/16/world/europe/nato-nations-no-longer-question-need-for-alliance.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/16/world/europe/nato-nations-no-longer-question-need-for-alliance.html?_r=0) (accessed December 16, 2015).

leadership experience, the United States is still the “go to” member nation for major security and collective defense operations.

Even while the European continent is dealing with a mass migration crisis and ongoing terrorist threats, the primary threat to the long term security and stability of the region is still Russia.<sup>32</sup> For this reason it is imperative the United States continue to lead this security alliance. The United States is the only member in NATO with the military capacity, capability, experience, and resources to confront Putin and deter Russian aggression.

One of the most fragile areas within NATO’s boundaries is the Baltic region. Moscow has consistently engaged in diplomatic, informational, psychological, and cyber warfare in this region.<sup>33</sup> In addition, Russia has conducted numerous military exercises on the borders of the Baltic nations, and at times violated airspace and threatened the territorial sovereignty of those nations. If Putin was to give the order to commence aggressive military action to occupy the Baltic states, it could take less than a week for Russian forces to achieve their objective according to some military experts.<sup>34</sup> To counter this threat General Philip Breedlove, NATO Supreme Allied Commanding General, recently stated: “Speed is of the essence to deter sudden threats along NATO’s borders. We also need to pre-position equipment and supplies, so that they can travel light but strike hard if needed.”<sup>35</sup> In addition to pre-positioning stocks the United States

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<sup>32</sup>Fenzel, and Picozzi.

<sup>33</sup> Heritage Foundation, 19.

<sup>34</sup> Jeremy Bender, “Incoming NATO Military Committee Chairman: Russia Could Occupy the Baltics in 2 Days if it Wanted to,” *BusinessInsider.com*, May 30, 2015, under “Military & Defense,” <http://www.businessinsider.com/russia-can-occupy-baltics-in-2-days-2015-5> (accessed February 13, 2016).

<sup>35</sup> Heritage Foundation, 20.

must demonstrate leadership by conducting multinational exercise and operations within the Baltic region, to include maritime incursions. There is no need to permanently station forces in Eastern Europe but by being the key contributor and lead agent in a rotational combat brigade, the United States will assure NATO and its Baltic nations of its commitment to security in the region. Another alternative to demonstrate the United States willingness to uphold its Article V commitment is to establish a rotational U.S. Marine air-ground task force in the Baltic Sea similar to the current Black Sea Rotational Force.<sup>36</sup> Only by taking the lead in the standoff with Putin can the United States “stem the tide of Russia’s advances with tangible efforts to protect American interests in Europe and strengthen the resolve of the NATO alliance.”<sup>37</sup>

In opposition to being out front leading the organization into the future, there is the theory that the United States should lead the organization from behind as was seen during Operation Unified Protector in Libya in 2011. While there is validity to this theory, this thesis posits that this style of leadership must remain secondary to strongly leading from the front. In the appropriate conditions there is merit to leading from behind. The primary benefit derived from being able to lead NATO from behind is that it allows the United States to focus its finite resources on other strategic areas of importance around the globe. As mentioned earlier, excellent examples of this leadership style are Operation ACTIVE ENDEAVOUR and Operation OCEAN SHIELD. Both of these operations, which are led by NATO member nations other than the United States,

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>37</sup> Fenzel and Picozzi.

allow the U.S. to use its maritime assets in other strategic hotspots around the globe such as the South China Sea and the Persian Gulf, among others.

Moreover, the United States is better manned, trained, and equipped to project power globally to handle decisive military engagements, while many NATO members are better suited for low intensity, smaller scale peacekeeping and humanitarian operations.

As Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson (R-Texas) argued on June 15, 2011:

That the United States should lead when and where United States capabilities are essential: but others can lead where they have the capability to do so..., Smaller operations such as Kosovo, and Libya could be led by other NATO members, so that when big things happen such as Afghanistan which will continue to require our commitment – those major efforts can be led by the United States with our capabilities and commitment.<sup>38</sup>

Lastly, by continuing to lead NATO into the future the United States will assure its allies and partners of its steadfast commitment to America's security obligations. Strong American leadership demonstrates to NATO's adversaries the alliance's resolve to the collective defense and security of not only the European region, but also its interests around the globe.

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<sup>38</sup> Petersson, *The U.S.-NATO Debate*, 41.

## CONCLUSION

From its inception in December 1950, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has been the bedrock of European security and the strategic foundation of the United States' foreign policy to the European region. When the Berlin Wall came down, signifying the beginning of the end of the Cold War, many international relations scholars were quick to argue that NATO had become obsolete, and that the new strategic environment called for more soft power. From the United States' perspective, some experts contend that NATO is out of date with current United States' foreign policy. With the recent events in Eastern Europe; the Syrian migration crisis, and Russia's actions in Crimea, Ukraine, and Syria, the debate on the future of NATO within United States' foreign policy has gained more intensity. The issue of Europe's collective defense is a strategic priority more now in the last eighteen months than it has been in the last twenty years. Potential Russian actions in Eastern Europe, the Baltics, Eurasia (Turkey), and the Scandinavian region, coupled with a probable NATO response, support the validity of the alliance's continued existence.

This thesis has argued that it is essential for the United States to continue to play a leading role in NATO. Moreover, a strong role in NATO provides the United States a conduit and connective structure to some of the world's most stable governments, serves as the main policy mechanism to influence Europe, and provides a venue for legitimacy and freedom of global action. Additionally, the United States must continue to exert pressure on NATO members to develop their defense capabilities, conduct more regional and global security operations, and lastly, meet the organization's mandated defense

spending benchmark of two percent of each member nation's gross domestic product (GDP).

NATO is indeed relevant to United States foreign policy and the achievement of its enduring national interests. As previously stated, Joseph Nye asserted that, "In a democracy, the national interest is simply the set of shared priorities regarding relations with the rest of the world," which substantiates NATO's relevance to U.S. national interests.<sup>1</sup> During the last fifteen years NATO has kept itself relevant by transforming the organization to respond to crises and threats outside of the European continent, but as Webber, Hallams, and Smith assert, current Russia actions in Crimea and Ukraine have shifted NATO's focus back to the continent.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, they discuss the need for the United States to continue to exact its influence in NATO since the size and reach of the U.S.'s elements of national power equalize the balance of power on the continent between the competing interests of Russia and Germany.<sup>3</sup>

Arguments were presented for both sides of the U.S. NATO debate but in the end, NATO continues to provide the United States the ability to protect vital national interests globally. The United States no longer provides security to NATO members by forward positioning hundreds of thousands of military forces along the Eastern European front. With the United States assistance NATO members are continuing to develop the capacity and capability to provide sufficient security with a decreased role of American forces.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Nye, "Redefining the National Interest." *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 4, (July/August 1999): 23, <https://nduezproxy.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=1952567&site=ehost-live&scope=site> (accessed November 13, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Mark Webber, Ellen Hallams, and Martin A. Smith, "Repairing NATO's motors," *International Affairs* 90, no. 4, (July 2014): 784, *Business Source Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 10, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 782.

With the enlargement of NATO alliance, most members are now suppliers of regional security instead of consumers.<sup>4</sup>

Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR (Libya 2011) was used as a case study to demonstrate the while that United States is still the largest power in NATO, possessing the ability to lead and conduct full spectrum of operations, there are times where leading from behind can not only benefit the alliance but also allow the U.S. to focus its assets globally in the achievement of its national interests.

This thesis proposed three recommendations for United States foreign policy moving forward with regard to NATO and the achievement of its national interests:

- 1) The United States needs to support selective NATO enlargement to assure the world that the alliance is not only a major player in the security and defense of the European Continent but also globally.
- 2) The United States must demonstrate its commitment to NATO by continuing to invest in the alliance by building the security and defense capabilities of member nations.
- 3) The United States must continue to provide strong leadership to NATO, while training and increasing the capacity of member nations to take the lead in small scale operations.

By implementing these three recommendations and continuing to lead NATO into the future, the United States will assure its allies and partners of its steadfast commitment to America's security obligations and demonstrate to NATO's adversaries the alliance's resolve to the collective defense and security of not only the European region but also its interests globally.

Finally, NATO continues to be the United States' primary connection to some of the world's most stable governments and is its primary conduit and main policy

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<sup>4</sup> Barack Obama and Leon E. Panetta, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, (Washington D.C.: Dept. of Defense, 2012), <http://purl.fdlp.gov/GPO/gpo18079> (accessed December 12, 2015), 3.



mechanism to influence Europe. Now a full quarter of a century after the end of the Cold War, the idea of NATO losing its relevancy should be set aside as uninformed. NATO continues to be of vital importance to United States' enduring national security interests and remains central to its national strategies. It is essential that the United States continues its leadership role in the strongest alliance the world has ever known.

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## VITA

Lieutenant Colonel Sean Counihan was commissioned into the United States Army from the University of West Florida in 1995 as a Transportation Officer. He has served in numerous leadership and staff officer positions in the Regular Army (Fort Carson, CO), Army Reserve (Connecticut and Massachusetts), and as a USAR AGR Officer (Fort Indiantown Gap, PA; St. Louis, MO; Indianapolis, IN; and the National Capital Region). His deployments include S1, 378<sup>th</sup> Corps Support Battalion (Kuwait - 2003-2004); and Commander, 724<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company (Iraq – 2009-2010). His most recent assignment was as Regional Deputy Director (West Region) for the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserves (OSD-Reserve Affairs). Lieutenant Colonel Counihan holds a Master's in Business Administration from Webster University, Graduate Certificate in Supply Chain Management from Northeastern University, and a Bachelor of Science in Physical Education from the University of West Florida.

